

## SB 87

Testimony by Pat Keim on behalf of Alternatives, Inc. of Billings

Alternatives Inc. has operated the men's and women's pre-lease centers in Billings for nearly 30 years under contract with the Department of Corrections.

We do accept level 1 and 2 sex offenders from the Department and the courts. We have on very rare occasions taken a level 3 offender, but those instances could be counted on one hand over the last 30 years and usually involved an offender who would be discharged from prison rather than paroled. We do not accept all that are referred. At Alpha House, the men's center, sexual offenders generally represent less than 10% of the resident population. They stay for 12 months rather than the usual 6 month pre-release stay.

We screen the referrals to assure that the ones we take have a heightened success rate for reintegration into the community. Each applicant is screened not only by our local committee but also by the South Central Treatment Associates prior to our consideration. Accepted offenders are at least evaluated for treatment when they arrive, and almost without exception are undergoing treatment with a Montana Sex Offender Treatment Association (MSOTA) certified therapist during the entire period that they stay in pre-release. The counseling staff of the PRC, in conjunction with the MSOTA therapist, set rules and conditions that are in many cases far more restrictive than those in SB87, but it is done on an individual basis, specific to the individual requirements of the case.

Alpha House, which has been at its current location for about 30 years, could fall within the 500' with regards to schools and other community facilities listed in the bill. Residents at Alpha House aren't allowed to loiter, but there is an outside smoking area and benches where they wait for transportation to and from work and other appointments. There is a school just a few blocks away. We can work with SB 87 as drafted provided that subsection 6 of Section 4 on page 6 line 4-5 remains. This item provides a grandfathering exemption that Alternatives, Inc needs. That exemption is important to us.

A second and very important issue that needs to be addressed in the SB 87 is found in Section 1(4) on page 2 lines 5-8. This is the matter of not locating "regular employment" within 500' of a "school, daycare, playground, park, bike or walking path, athletic field, or business caring for, educating, or entertaining minors." That list pretty well covers an entire community. This bill restricts employment to less than 90 days if the job is within 500' of any of these sites. Given a stay at the PRC of one year, that could mean having to find four separate jobs for each of our residents. That would create an unacceptable turnover rate for employers. What about a person whose employment may include a delivery route or service of some kind? What about a construction worker sent out to various job sites? Available jobs for our charges often involve being within 500' of such listed facilities even while they are under supervision.

An important issue in supervising a sexual offender is assuring that the persons they associate with, including employers, know the nature of the offense, warning signs for re-offense and who to contact with questions or concerns. Limiting where an offender can work could therefore backfire by eliminating employers who are responsive and serious about providing supervision or by forcing a change of employer once the offender leaves the PRC program. A job is an important component of a successful reintegration into the community in a safe and structured manner. We think this subsection 4 needs to be struck from the bill.

*What happens if a listed community moves in next to an employer of a sexual offender? Does the employee get fired? Does the employer have to move?*  
Lastly, the terms "minor" and "child" seem to be used interchangeably throughout the bill. For example the term "minor" appears in page 1 lines 13, 14, 18, 20, and 30, while the term child appears on the same page in lines 22, 23, and 27. What is the definition of a child and does it differ from a minor?